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AUTHOR Ogan, Christine; Swift, Clint
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ABSTRACT

Defining development as a participatory process within a society aimed at creating or maintaining social structures and institutions that allow a society's present and future needs to be met, a study was undertaken to discover what kind of treatment was given to development news by Third World media. Eleven foreign newspapers from a university library were analyzed for content for 1 month. The papers came from a variety of countries, including China, Israel, and Canada, and from five countries in Africa. A total of 3,031 development news items were found, or about 9 or 10 items per issue. A measure of the proportion of the page and determination of the priority each item had received were made. Over half of the items were less than one-eighth of the page. Priority estimation followed a similar pattern, in that only 28.5% of the items were high priority, 49% were given middle priority, and 22.5% received low priority. Development news was primarily gathered by the newspaper staff or the national news agency of the country, and most items came from the latter. The results appeared to support the charges that Third World media place no more emphasis on development news than do Western news agencies. (HTH)

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IS THE NEWS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT ALL GOOD?

A Content Analysis of Selected Foreign Newspapers

by

Christine Ogan
and
Clint Swift

School of Journalism
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405

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Clint Swift

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In the ongoing debate over the role of the Big Four western news agencies in covering the news about the Third World, the words "development news" or "development journalism" have been used to describe what is missing in Western concepts of news value.

Many journalists and critics in a variety of Third World nations charge that the "good news" about the progress made toward development is seldom found in the Western press--and indeed such news doesn't even get out of the country to benefit other neighboring or distant developing countries.

Some persons believe it is also important to disseminate information about the failures of development. This news may be helpful to other countries that may be considering similar approaches.

Narinder Aggarwala, regional information officer for Asia and the Pacific at the United Nations Development Program, claims that most Western correspondents interested in spot news about the sensational, strange and exotic, neglect information about "movements on the development front in the problem-ridden Third World." (1981, p. 8)

Aggarwala would not have this news be equated with government controlled news and information handouts; rather it should be looked upon as a new form of investigative reporting. (1978, p. 200) The journalist's job on a development newsbeat is to "critically examine and evaluate the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is." (1979, p. 181)

Other persons writing about the importance of covering news of development[1] have been dismayed about the lack of such news in the Western press and that of developing countries where the AP, UPI, Reuters and AFP are the main

sources of foreign news.

If the charge that development news is undercovered is accurate--and some research lends support to that conclusion (Lent & Rao; Weaver and Wilhoit)--the question of how the developing world covers such news about itself is then raised. Is news value so different in the Third World that bridge-building, family planning and vaccination campaigns are front page items and political news is subordinate to development project news?

In one content analysis of development news in two major Indian newspapers, Vilanilam found that little attention was paid to developmental categories of "family planning, housing, economic activity, education and literacy, employment and labour welfare, health hygiene and medicine, rural and urban development and social change." (1975, p. 40) Political activity comprised the majority of news in the two papers, while some attention was paid to agriculture, technology, scientific and industrial development.

Vilanilam's research was limited to a study of the amount of such news in the two papers of one country for a constructed week.

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to find out what priority is being placed on development news in the press of selected Third World countries.[2] Very few studies have specifically examined the development news coverage in the world. As a result, both Third World and Western news media representatives continue to hurl criticisms at one another without substantiation. This study was meant to begin to provide some concrete data concerning the nature of development news.

The research purpose was also to discover what kind of treatment was actually given to development news--was the information merely a report based on a government handout as claimed by many Western correspondents and

news agency personnel, or was such news treated in an analytic, investigative manner as Aggarwala would have it? Specifically the following questions were addressed:

1. What importance is given to development news in the newspapers of selected countries?
2. What development topics receive the greatest attention?
3. What is the nature of the sources utilized in the reporting of development news?
4. How critical are the development news items and what is the nature of that criticism?
5. Are there any differences in development news reporting in different systems:
   a. the privately-owned newspapers in countries with relatively little government controle over the media (hereafter referred to as privately owned);
   b. the non-socialist newspapers in countries with relatively high government control over the media (hereafter referred to as non-socialist); and
   c. the newspapers in socialist countries in which media are highly controlled (hereafter referred to as socialist).

Definition of terms

In arriving at an operational definition for "development" and "development news," the researchers, along with an entire graduate class in communication and national development,[3] examined a number of other definitions and discussed the concepts in an ideal sense as well as in their use in other research.[4]

Development was defined as "a participatory process within a society aimed at creating and/or maintaining social structures and institutions which allow society's present and future needs to be met. The process is shaped by members of the total society in the context of their history, their culture and the environment they are seeking to control."

Development was not considered a terminal process; different countries,

including those presently considered developed on certain scales, would be included in the definition.

Development news, or news about this process, was operationalized as any news report, feature story, photograph, piece of art work, editorial, syndicated column or letter to the editor that related to development. Excluded were announcements, politics, crime, comics and other unrelated items. A total of 24 categories into which development news could be broken was identified.[5]

Foreign newspapers in the university library were selected for examination based on their availability and the language skills of the coders. Newspapers from 11 countries were chosen.

Originally the newspapers were to be analyzed for the same time period. However, due to problems of availability for a comparable period, each paper was content analyzed for one month between March and August 1981. About 70% of the newspapers analyzed were issues from the months of March and June 1981. Although ideally use of the same month for all newspapers would have been better methodologically, it can be argued that no matter what the time frame, a newspaper dedicated to the philosophy of covering development news would include such news at all times of the year. The amount and nature of that news should not vary substantially from month to month.

The newspapers included in the study were as follows: Granma, Havana, Cuba; Botswana Daily News, Gabarone, Botswana; The People's Daily, Beijing, China; The Herald, Salisbury, Zimbabwe; Al-Madinah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; The Jerusalem Post, Jerusalem, Israel; Neuer Weg, Bucharest, Romania; The Daily Nation, Nairobi, Kenya; The Rand Daily Mail, Johannesburg, South Africa; The Globe & Mail, Toronto, Canada; and The New Nigerian, Lagos, Nigeria.

Newspaper content was analyzed according to the relationship of the press with the government of the country. Countries which exercised little control over press content, and where the newspaper is privately owned include Canada, Israel and South Africa.[6]

Countries where the government exerts a relatively large influence on the press-where the press is either government-owned or privately owned and subject to great control include: Botswana, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Nigeria.

Government control in a different form, in the planned economy, exists in Romania, Cuba and China.

The selected newspapers of the several countries were grouped accordingly for a part of the analysis.

Although the definition for development included poor agrarian countries as well as large industrial nations, there was a need to decide which countries of the world would be called "developed" and which ones "developing." For purposes of this research, the World Bank classification was modified such that all industrialized countries and the centrally planned economies with relatively high GNP/pc were termed "developed," while all low and middle income countries, the capital-surplus oil exporters and the low GNP/pc centrally planned economies were called "developing."[7] The researchers were somewhat dissatisfied with this classification system, given the notion that all countries continue the development process, but on one or two variables an arbitrary decision on this issue was required.

Two reliability checks on a sample of content across several English language newspapers in the study were conducted; one about the middle of the study, and one towards the end. Results of a pair-wise reliability check on several of the research variables revealed a wide range of reliability, from a negative value of Scott's Pi to a 1.00 value. Part of the problem in obtaining consistently high levels arose from the nature of the cross-cultural coding.

Eight different nationalities were represented in the class. Most of the coders chose newspapers from their own countries--or neighboring countries. It was felt that the coding of familiar material in the native language of the coder produced more reliable results than the artificial reliability checks on the cross sample of material. The subject of reliability using non-English material and foreign coders needs to be addressed more thoroughly in the future.

Results

Amount and Source of Story

A total of 3,031 development news items were found in the one-month examination of 11 newspapers, or about 9-10 items per issue.[8] Development news was about evenly distributed over the days of the week.

About 75% of the items consisted of a story only, while 21% included a photo or illustration to accompany the story.

The prominence given to the development news was somewhat difficult to standardize across the newspapers as some papers were in broadsheet form with 20 or more pages per issue, and others were eight-page tabloids. Therefore a measure of the proportion of the page and a determination of whether the item received high, middle or low priority was made.[9] Only 17% of the items coded covered one-fourth of the page or more; 25% spanned 1/8 - 1/4 page; and 58% were less than 1/8 page.

Priority estimation followed a similar pattern. High priority was given to only 28.5% of the items; middle-level priority was assigned to 49% and low priority to 22.5% of the items.

The need for receiving news about development from other countries may be present, but the predominant practice is to report on the native country. More than 86% of all development news originated within the country. Less than 3% of the development news originated in neighboring countries and another 5% came from another developing country outside the region. Some persons would attribute this local orientation trend to the

inability to gather news outside the native country. Supporting bureaus of the national news agency or foreign correspondents is an expensive business and if the world news agencies don't supply that information, it may be impossible to get.

Clearly, the news about development is primarily gathered by the newspaper staff or the national news agency in the country. Less than 5% of all development items were attributed to any of the major world agencies (that includes Tass).

Recently much has been written about the rise of cooperative news pools which are meant to generate more development news to be used by other interested nations. Tanjug's Non-aligned News Pool, begun in 1976, has been the most publicized of these cooperatives, but Inter Press Service, based in Rome, and a number of regional news cooperatives in Africa, Asia and the Middle East have recently been established to fill in the gaps left in development news coverage by the major wire services.

The amount of news available to the newspapers in this study from the existent cooperative agencies is unknown, but only 14 items originated from any regional or international news cooperative.

The newspapers in the study seem to keep in relatively good touch with their leaders regarding development issues as about 5% of the items were attributed to readers.

The bulk of the development news was attributed to the national news agency of the country (23.4%) or a reporter working for the newspaper itself (56.3%). (See Table 1)

Development News Topics

A total of 24 separate topics were listed in coding the news items. Nearly 50% of the stories concerned only five topics, however: agriculture, economics, education, industry and national integration. About 75% of the

stories mentioned only 10 topics. In addition to the five listed, the topics of culture, labor, health, trade and transport made up three-fourths of the topics mentioned.

Treatment of Development News

Some of the criticisms of development news as it presently appears were substantiated in this study. And then again, the analysis of the treatment of development news also turned up some surprises.

Although one might think that development news would generally appear in feature format--and some of the cooperative agencies which are promoting development news are called feature agencies--this study found the majority of the news to be spot news (58.9%) rather than feature (40.4%).[10]

The sources consulted for the development news are thought by Western critics to be primarily government sources and the information distributed to reporters appearing in the form of official public relations handouts. The results of this content analysis lent some support to that idea--but other non-government sources were also consulted in the observed stories.

More human sources than documents were used (51.4% vs. 23.7%). Some stories used both human and document sources (7.5%) and the rest of the items were pictures, graphics or other unidentified sources.

As to how these sources were used in the stories, alone or with other sources, both critics and supporters of the use of development news can take some pleasure. Government sources only were used in 35.9% of the stories, but no government sources were consulted in an additional 25.8% of the news items. Another 14.2% used government sources along with other sources and 23.9% did not provide attribution for the sources consulted.

When these sources were described in more detail (official government, official opposition, government expert, non-government opposition, non-government expert or person affected by the news story) the overwhelming

single source of news was the government official (26%). It is likely that analysis of most developed countries' news coverage on many topics would demonstrate a reliance on government sources, however. Of the non-government sources consulted, .6% of the stories used non-government opposition; 18.3% used non-government experts, 15.0% used other non-government persons; and 8.9% used the person affected by the issue. The total number of stories in which non-government sources were used was 1,293, or 30.8%.[11]

Foreign sources were infrequently used in the stories of the study. A total of 353 items, or 11.7% of the items used foreign sources only; another 4.4% used both foreign and native sources. As expected, the large percentage of stories originated within the country, 67.2% relying on only native sources. Developing countries are therefore relying more on their own expertise on issues of development than on foreign experts for such information. This was seen as a healthy trend.

A cross tabulation of sources (foreign and native) with the topics of the development news showed that foreigners tend to be consulted more frequently on issues of economics, family planning, mass media, urbanization and migration, science, trade and race relations than on other topics.

Several variables in the study were set up to test the actual treatment of development news against the ideals set up by Aggarwala. Essentially the question is: Are newspapers allowed to criticize government officials and other government and non-government agencies, initiators of development projects, etc. in the reporting of development news? Or in fact, is "good news" all the public gets on these issues?

The results of this study provide mixed answers to that question. Some stories are critical; many are not. Some present a balanced coverage of

issues; some do not. Some serve a true investigative purpose and others do not.

Coders were asked to assess the overall tone of the stories they read. While it wasn't difficult for the coders to distinguish between stories with a positive or negative tone, those stories which were balanced or neutral presented some problem.

Initially, a "balanced" story was defined as one which contained both positive and negative elements, but the overall coverage was perceived to present a fair assessment of both kinds of elements. The neutral story, on the other hand, was one which was written in such a way that it contained neither support for nor criticism of any element of the story. Because of coder difficulty in definition, "neutral" and "balanced" stories were combined.

About half (53%) of the stories were positive, while only 10% were negative. The balanced or neutral stories comprised the remainder (37%).

About one-fourth (23.2%) of the stories contained statements from sources critical of the development, while about half (51.0%) contained no critical sources. The other one-fourth (25.7%) could not be coded on this variable.[12]

In general, little evaluation of the development issue was contained in the stories. Four variables dealt with evaluation, as follows: a comparison of the outcome of a development-related event with the original plan; a comparison of the claim for success of the event with its actual success; speculation on the future of the development; and a comparison of the development in the native country with a similar event in another country(ies). Since many of the stories could not be examined in this way (about one-third didn't deal with an actual project or tangible development plans) those

stories could not be coded on these variables. Of the stories to which these variables were pertinent, the following results were obtained:

1. About one-third (31.3%) of the stories compared the outcome of the development with the original goal.

2. About one-third (34.4%) of the stories compared the success of the development with the claim for success.

3. About 2/3 of the stories (65.5% speculated on the future of the development.

4. Only 21.3% made any comparion with a similar development event in another country.

Breakdown by Type of System

A look at the countries represented in the study might lead one to expect real differences in the way in which development news would be covered in one area of the world or another. Therefore, a descriptive analysis based on the philosophy of the role of the press in the society and the nature of the relationship between the press and the government was undertaken.

Countries where the press is privately owned and relatively few restrictions on the newsgathering and reporting process are placed include Canada, Israel and South Africa. In these countries, more critical reporting, the use of a greater number of critical sources and non-government sources, and more balanced reporting of issues was expected.

In the socialist countries of the study--Cuba, Romania and the People's Republic of China--greater use of government sources, criticism of the ways in which a plan was carried out (in line with Party philosophy), and an overall positive tone was expected.

Under a more authoritarian system, following Siebert et al.'s definition, where the press is either government owned or privately owned and closely

controlled by the government through press laws or other forms of censorship, the countries of Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Botswana, Kenya, and Nigeria fall.[13] Here more "good news" would be expected, if the Western critics are right. Reporting of development activity would likely contain less frequent use of critical sources and fewer critical statements about government-initiated plans or projects.

A breakdown of the newspapers into these general categories revealed fewer differences than might be expected.

Regarding the nature of sources consulted for the coded stories, somewhat more stories relied on "government sources only" in the more controlled countries' press. In the non-socialist newspapers 41.9% of the stories used only government sources, while in the privately-owned newspapers 28.8% of the stories relied only on government sources. The socialist newspapers contained development news stories in which 27.3% of the items relied on government sources only. However, the coders of the socialist newspapers pointed out that a large number of stories were not attributed to any source (25%) and these stories were likely based on government sources.

When the categories of "some" government sources and "only" government sources were combined there were fewer differences between the privately owned and the non-socialist papers. (See Table 2)

The main source used in the writing of the stories was an official government source. This held true for all three types of presses. Between 42% and 43% of all stories coded used a government source as the primary source. Non-government experts were the second most frequently consulted source in stories from all newspapers. (See Table 3)

Foreign sources were uncommon in all three categories of newspapers. Less than 16% of the stories consulted foreign sources in each category (varying from 9.6% in socialist newspapers to 15.5% in the privately owned news-

papers.)

The expected positive tone of the development news stories was found in both socialist (75.2% of items) and non-socialist newspapers (44.5% of items) while the privately-owned newspapers contained fewer positive items (28.2%). A balanced or neutral tone was found in 47.5% of the privately-owned stories, 46.5% of the non-socialist stories and 14.4% of the socialist items.

Sources critical of development issues were also consulted more frequently in the privately-owned stories (54.1% of the stories where this determination was applicable) than in the other newspapers--27.7% of non-socialist items and 28.5% of the socialist.

The variables in which the development issue was evaluated did not follow any pattern which could be predicted from the degree of press autonomy in the various countries.

Speculation on the future of the development event was the most frequent kind of evaluation--and probably the most easily made. One of the coders, a native Nigerian, said that the Nigerian newspapers were constantly speculating on the positive future outcome for some particular project, but that frequently, little progress toward the goal would be seen at the targeted date. In items where such speculation was possible, the privately-owned newspapers speculated in 66.9% of the items; the non-socialist papers did so in 57.8% of the items, and the socialist papers speculated in 75.8% of the items.

Comparison of the outcome of the development event with the original plan was made less frequently. In stories where this variable was applicable, 40% of the stories from the privately-owned newspaper, 33% of the non-socialist newspaper stories, and 78.7% of the socialist newspaper stories made comparisons. Since a constant evaluation of outcome vs. plan is part of the

socialist system philosophy, the relatively high percentage of items which were actually evaluated in this way was expected.

The outcome of the development event was compared with the claims for its success more often in the stories of the non-socialist (44.4%) and socialist (42.5%) than in those of the privately-owned (19.5%). Given the relatively high percentage of stories which were positive in tone, it is likely that such evaluation was not critical.

The least frequently used form of evaluation was the comparison of the development event with a similar event in another country. This was expected, given the relatively infrequent use of foreign sources and foreign wire service or cooperative news agency datelines. Only 15% of the stories (where this variable was applicable) made any comparison with other countries in the privately-owned newspaper stories; 22.6% of the stories made the comparison in the non-socialist papers; and 20.9% of the stories in the socialist papers compared development events cross-nationally. Since such seemingly little access to foreign information was available for use, the frequency of comparative statements is greater than might be expected.

Conclusions

There are no final answers to the charges made by either side in the discussion of coverage of development news. In an interview with Aggarwala on this subject, he said that the news values of journalists in many developing countries are not that much different from those existing in the United States, and that development news is just not a high priority item at the moment. (Feb. 13, 1982) Regional cooperative news agencies are just

now getting off the ground and one must look to the future for concrete evidence of the worth of these agencies in supplying development news.

The statement about low priority speaks to the amount and placement of development news, but not to the treatment of the news. The results of this study lend support to both sides of the issue. While it is true that the developing countries in this study tend to rely more on government sources for information and do not contain many critical sources from either government opposition or non-government sources, to some extent the same can be said for the countries in the privately owned group. Perhaps the state of the art in development news has not advanced much past the government agency-public relations mode.

It is also true that many of the stories did contain critical sources and did make an attempt at evaluating the development project, plan or policy. Certainly this study must be considered part of an on-going evaluation of development news--not for the purpose of quelling the strident voices in the argument--but rather for discovering how development news might best be used to promote the development goals of countries across the world.

A final note regarding the cross-national use of content analysis is in order here. As the push for a New International Information Order is not likely to disappear in the coming years, cross-national news flow and related studies will continue. It is important to conduct comparative research to determine news values and news reporting practices on an international level.

Content analysis, as a research method, is not without its problems when conducted in a single cultural setting. This study brought the compounded problems of cross-cultural analysis sharply into focus. Often when such research is conducted, inter-coder reliability is not even measured. The range of reliability in this study was extreme and would likely pose a similar problem wherever several languages and cultures were being used for coding. The failure to report reliability does not solve the problem. But measuring reliability on a

sample of the material in English is also not an ideal solution. Coders may be considerably more accurate in their native languages than they are in English. They may also fail to understand the subtleties of the coding process which are provided in English. Wherever translation of material is necessary, a problem exists. This problem needs to be directly addressed in future use of cross-national content analysis.

Although it is almost a cliche that researchers end papers of this nature with a call for more research and a note on the preliminary and tentative nature of the conclusions, this is the third piece of research conducted in this area by one of the authors. Future research will expand and improve on this analysis as well as examine the development news agencies' role and progress toward their espoused goals.

Notes

[1]Richard Critchfield, author of Villages and many other articles based on his observations of development at the grass roots level throughout the world, commented on the superficiality of development reporting and the lack of focus on the people who are affected by development policies in a recent seminar at Indiana University.

[2]The Toronto, Canada daily, The Globe & Mail, was also chosen for inclusion in the study. Although Canada would not be considered a Third World country, by any economic standard, the country does suffer the effects of being the U.S.'s northern neighbor and is concerned about the cultural and economic domination from the United States. The Globe & Mail also served as a kind of base line for the privately-owned, independent-of-government-influence newspapers in the study and does publish news about development on a regular basis.

[3]The class was composed of American and foreign graduate students who did the coding in their native languages--English, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese. Class members rejected traditional definitions of development which take a Western, linear and uni-directional view of the process in favor of one which allows the people of each culture to decide on development goals for themselves.

[4]See Christine L. Ogan, "Development Journalism/Communication: Status of the Concept," Paper presented to the AEJ International Division at the 1980 convention in Boston, Mass.

[5]The categories, each of which was operationalized in some detail, are as follows: agriculture, consumerism, culture, economics, education, family/family planning, food, labor, health, housing, industry, mass media, population, national integration, religion, science, telecommunications, tourism, trade, transport, urbanization/migration, race relations, government and other.

[6]Since the time of the study, further controls over press content by the governments of both South Africa and Israel have been proposed. It was felt that at the time of the study, however, the newspapers in the three countries could best be described as privately-owned, little-controlled.

[7]The following countries were classified as developed: Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, Japan, Australia, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Norway, The Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, The United States of America, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Czechoslovakia, Hungary. All others were classified as developing.

[8]Some days of the week were missing for each newspaper, the issues not having been received by the library. But the missing dates were not the same for each paper nor the same days of the week over the month's time period.

Notes (contd.)

[9]This general classification was used because of the differing layouts of newspapers in different countries. Both Chinese and Arab newspapers are read from back to front and "high priority" placement varied from newspaper to newspaper, depending on the cultural tradition.

[10]Spot news was defined as an item primarily about a specific event while feature was defined as an item about a process or a series of related events. In about 1.7 percent of the stories, the coders could not make a determination on this variable.

[11]Multiple coding for up to three sources was permitted.

[12]A "not applicable" category was reserved for stories which did not contain information which would allow for critical sources--announcements of plans for development projects or advance notices of meetings about a development issue are examples of this kind of story.

[13]The authors do not claim that the government-press relationship in these countries is identical--only that there is some similarity and some tendency toward an authoritarian approach to press control.

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Table 1

Source of News Story
for Development News

	Number of Stories	%
International Wire Service	148	4.9
Development News Agency	14	.5
National News Agency or Other National Source	709	23.4
Newspaper's Own Reporter	1707	56.3
Reader Initiated	140	4.6
No Source Cited	313	10.3
Total	3031	100 %

Table 2

Breakdown of Newspapers
by Type and Use of Government
Sources for Development News

	Privately Owned (Least Controlled) (n = 373)	Non-Socialist (Highly Controlled) (n = 1618)	Socialist (Highly Controlled) (n = 1038)
No Government Sources Consulted	36.2%	22.5%	27.3%
Only Government Sources Consulted	28.7	41.9	29.2
Some Government Sources Consulted	22.8	9.4	18.6
No Attribution Given	12.4	26.2	25.0
Total	100.1% *	100.0%	100.1% *

* Numbers exceed 100% due to rounding

Table 3

Breakdown of Newspapers
by Type and Classification
of Sources Consulted for Stories

	Privately Owned (Least Controlled) (n = 370)	Non-Socialist (Highly Controlled) (n = 1608)	Socialist (Highly Controlled) (n = 1032)
Official Government Source	43.2%	43.0%	41.9%
Official Government Opposition	1.9	.5	.1
Government Expert	3.0	7.4	3.7
Non-government Opposition	.3	.6	.1
Non-government Expert	23.5	12.3	9.6
Other Non-government	10.3	7.0	12.1
Person Affected	4.3	4.0	3.9
No Source Attributed	13.5	25.2	28.7
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%*

* Exceeds 100% due to rounding.